

Homeworks

Know where to properly place your home's smoke detectors

The majority of fires in the home occur at night. If there's a fire in your home, there's a chance you won't wake up. Smoke and poisonous gases may actually numb your senses and send you even deeper into sleep. It's no kiss from a prince, but a smoke alarm will wake any Sleeping Beauty.

There are two basic types of smoke detectors: ionization and photoelectric. The ionization alarm has a small chamber that produces electronically charged air particles and ions. It sounds when smoke enters and disrupts the flow of ions. This alarm is best at detecting flaming fires with very little smoke.

The photoelectric alarm is best for detecting a smouldering fire. Its light source generates a beam that is deflected by smoke into a photo cell, causing the alarm to sound. Properly placed, an alarm can be heard from any bedroom in the house.

Alarms should be installed outside of all bedrooms and on every level of your home. Don't forget the basement: install an alarm over an old fuse box or breaker panel. If you live in a home with only one floor and all of the bedrooms share a common passageway, one alarm may be all you need. Sleeping with your bedroom door closed? Install the alarm inside your room instead, particularly if you use electrical appliances.

False alarms can be triggered by cooking, steam, fumes and exhaust, some of the same things that can cause fire so you may want to install a detector near the kitchen, bathroom and garage.

A battery operated fire alarm is easy to install. Mount it high on a wall or ceiling, away from any corners. The dead air space in the corners delays alarm activation. On a flat ceiling, it should be at least 150 millimetres or six inches from the nearest wall. If you install it on the wall, the top of the alarm should be between 150 millimetres (six inches) and 300 millimetres (12 inches) from the ceiling.

Test your alarm by pushing the test button at least once a week. Replace batteries twice a year unless your alarm beeps intermittently. Then replace them right away. Never use rechargeable batteries, they'll quit without warning. As you clean the house, vacuum the alarm detector chamber and protective cover. If a smoke alarm gets clogged with dirt and dust it will malfunction.

When you buy an alarm, make sure it's approved by the Underwriters' Laboratories of Canada (ULC) or the Canadian Standards Association (CSA). Then devise an escape plan in case it ever goes off. If your Prince never comes to wake you from your slumber, you can bet your alarm will.

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